

State. The U.S. Department of Transportation overruled Florida's objections.

In the 2005 bill—so I am going to another Transportation bill; it was called the SAFETEA-LU—included 6,371 earmarks. Let's go over that again. Let's go back. In 1987, President Reagan vetoed a bill because there were only 152 earmarks. Ten years later, TEA-21 included 1,850 earmarks and then, 2005, 6,371 earmarks.

However, under the earmark ban, the last Transportation bill distributed 92 percent of the funding to the States through formulas. And then, you know, that gives States and local governments control over the funding decision based on the needs of the 50 different States, based on safety, engineering, and other objective criteria, as opposed to politically directed earmarks that totally sweep aside those criteria. It was almost a political decision where that money ought to be put.

It should also be pointed out that the majority of the earmark funds in the past came straight out of the allocated formula dollars for each State, which then further eroded merit and State and local decision making. In other words, Washington politicians were making decisions better made by the nonpartisan boards in State capitols and local communities. And when I say "nonpartisan boards," I don't suppose it is that way in all 50 States, but I know in most Midwestern States it is that way.

I know that a lot of good has come from projects that I have helped support in Iowa, when we had our earmarks, and I certainly did not want Iowa to miss out on funding just because of a Washington dysfunction that we called earmarks. However, I also know that many of these earmarks disrupted our State and regional planning efforts. I have no way of knowing what good might have been done had we not had earmarks banned earlier. I do know that I have faith that the Federal money that goes back to Iowa for Iowans and the Iowans deciding how it is to be spent is being spent thoughtfully and well and not with a lot of political consideration.

Any good that might come from my being able to direct small amounts of Federal taxpayer dollars to some worthwhile pilot project would be dwarfed by the negative effects of restarting the mad scramble for earmarks.

So I hope, my colleagues, the rumors I have been hearing about the Appropriations Committee wanting to reinstitute earmarks, I hope that those people would pay some attention to the history of it and particularly pay attention to what President Obama said in 2010 about earmarks and not go through another process, maybe starting out with just a few earmarks but getting up into more than several years, more than 10,000 earmarks in various appropriations bills, and then all of a sudden then have a mandate

that came from the electorate, like it did in 2010, and both Republicans and Democrats come back to these halls where we have debate and make policy, saying no more earmarks.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

NOMINATION OF MIGUEL A. CARDONA

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, I couldn't be prouder to stand in the Senate Chamber today and speak on behalf of Miguel Cardona, shortly to be confirmed by this body as the next Secretary of Education.

Miguel Cardona is a man of deep commitment to his community and, with pride, a product of the Connecticut education system. I couldn't be prouder to support him because President Biden couldn't have made a better choice to be the next Secretary of Education.

Miguel Cardona's story is inspiring and compelling, a testament to the extraordinary support he has enjoyed from his parents, from the community of Puerto Rico, who lived in Meriden, the support he enjoyed from the public schools and institutions of higher education in Connecticut. His powerful and compelling story should be inspiring to all America because he has lived the American dream. And for anyone whose language may be something other than English as their first language, he has shown that people coming to our public schools, with English as their second language, should see no bounds to what they can accomplish.

He came to the public schools of Meriden as a second-language learner of English. He was raised in Meriden by Puerto Rican parents. He found an early passion for education. And his skill and dedication went beyond his own life. He did extraordinarily well and attended two Connecticut institutions of higher education—Central Connecticut State University and the University of Connecticut—eventually earning his doctorate in education. But he went back to Meriden. He dedicated his life to the education of others, beginning as a fourth grade teacher in Meriden and then becoming principal—the youngest in the State—and eventually assistant superintendent before just about a year ago being appointed as commissioner of education in the State of Connecticut.

His climbing looks meteoric and miraculous, but it was based on hard work and a dedication and passion to education for others, because he saw it in his own life and how it enabled him to live the American dream.

For all of his accomplishments and that meteoric rise, he has remained deeply rooted in the Meriden community, deeply committed to his roots in Puerto Rico, and deeply committed to his family. His parents, who should be so proud of him, are an inspiration to all of us who know them and who have seen their work in Meriden continue. Even as he has climbed the professional ladder, they have remained rooted and

active and energetic in benefiting others in Meriden.

So to his parents, I say thank you for sharing with us Miguel. To his family, thank you for supporting him throughout his enormous journey and adventure.

His extraordinary accomplishments have led him to this place of consummate prominence in the educational professional community, and now he will do great things for the cause of education in our country, not just Connecticut.

His service never stopped in the classroom. He brought that knowledge of what happens in the classroom to establish policy in Connecticut in an enormously challenging time. He took over as commissioner of education on February 26, 2020, at the time of COVID-19 lockdowns and school closures, which began just a couple of weeks after he assumed that responsibility.

But as he has done throughout his educational and professional career, he consistently reaffirmed his commitment to students, parents, and teachers because they are the core of our educational system, especially students who have been potentially left behind. His bold vision and dedication to students and their families is exactly what we need now in an Education Secretary, providing direction and support to our Nation's public schools—direction and support after a time when leadership was so sorely lacking and commitment to public education was so unfortunately inadequate.

As we know, COVID-19 has challenged educators, students, families, and school administrators, day in and day out, during this very difficult and painful period. Disadvantaged students who lack support and resources at home have been left behind. Teachers are strained and stressed by changing environments and a lack of resources. Parents are concerned and overwhelmed, managing their children's schooling and their own work at home. Students in higher education are drowning in student debt that has left them crippled financially and unsure about their future.

These challenges pose a grave threat to the future of our children and our educational system, and we need a leader just like Dr. Cardona—one whom we have lacked, one who can regain our Nation's trust and reestablish faith in the leadership of our educational community at the very top in the Department of Education.

He is someone who will put students back on their feet, in their confidence and their trust in education. He is someone who will put teachers, parents, and students first, above special interests, because he has lived American education as the American dream.

In Connecticut, he has seen firsthand in his own life how education can transform futures and enable all of us, through our children, to live the American dream just as he has done. And he

will do it in a way that is inclusive, that respects the drive for racial justice, because he has lived that movement in his own life—the movement for racial justice. To end disparities and inequities are part of Miguel Cardona's agenda because it is his life. It is in his DNA, and it is part of his heritage and his family. And that is the reason why I am so proud of his success, but also of his vision and his dedication to the future of American education.

I urge my colleagues to vote yes for his confirmation. You will be proud you did, just as I am proud to stand here in support of him. He has lived the American dream, and he will open it through his vision and his courage for countless other young people who desperately need that faith in their country and its schools.

Today, American public education has a future that is bright and promising with Miguel Cardona's leadership. I am proud to say he is a product of Connecticut. His roots are there, and so is his vision and hope and faith.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

TEXAS

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, last Friday, I joined Governor Abbott, fellow Members of the Texas congressional delegation, and several State and local leaders and joined President Biden on his first trip to Texas since taking office on January 20. We only wish it could have come under better circumstances.

Texans, of course, are still reeling from the deadly winter freeze that crippled our critical infrastructure and left millions without power and water. Thousands of Texans are still without clean water and under a boil instruction, and countless others are dealing with the damage caused by burst pipes.

I truly appreciate the President and the First Lady coming to Houston to learn more about the ongoing response and recovery efforts, and I thank the President for answering the request of Senator CRUZ, Governor Abbott, and myself to order a national disaster declaration.

During times of crisis, Texans are always eager to lend a hand to their neighbors, and the last couple of weeks have proved to be no exception. I am always encouraged by those heartwarming stories of folks helping others in ways big and small: welcoming people into their homes, checking on their elderly neighbors, delivering hot meals to those in need, and much more.

So I am glad the President and First Lady were able to see the incredible work also of one of the Houston area's most reliable friends, and that is the Houston Food Bank. For more than 40 years, the Houston Food Bank has fought hunger in the Houston region through a variety of programs serving Texans of all ages. When COVID-19 hit last year, the need for that assistance skyrocketed, as you might imagine.

I was able to visit the food bank last summer to learn more about how they

have adjusted their operations to keep up with the demand, while implementing precautions to keep their volunteers safe and healthy. So I was glad to join the President and First Lady to learn more about the incredible ways that the Houston Food Bank has continued to serve the community in the wake of this winter storm.

As I have said before and, as the President reiterated on Friday in Houston, there is no red team, there is no blue team during a time of crisis.

FEMA officials have said that disaster response efforts work best when they are locally executed, State managed, and federally supported, and I agree that is the appropriate formula. This structure gives local officials the ability to cater response efforts to their specific communities while tapping into the range of resources available from the State and Federal Government.

I want to assure my fellow Texans that I and the entire Texas delegation here in Congress will continue to do everything we can to be responsive to the needs that they have. Part of that, though, is through rapid mobilization of resources. After Governor Abbott, as I said, made the formal request for an emergency disaster declaration, Senator CRUZ and I sent a letter to President Biden urging him to grant that request. And, as I said, he did so without delay.

So this formal disaster declaration has allowed our State to receive a range of resources to respond to the crisis, including blankets, bottled water, generators, and additional fuel. These resources were vital to sustaining hospital operations and supporting the most vulnerable Texans while power and water were being restored.

Senator CRUZ and I also wrote to the President urging him to grant the Governor's request for a major disaster declaration and all types of public and individual assistance for each of Texas's 254 counties. A major disaster declaration opens up even more Federal resources to help communities and individuals recover in the aftermath of an emergency like this. It can include everything from housing assistance for folks who are unable to stay in their home due to water leakage and burst pipes to unemployment assistance to crisis counseling.

So far, President Biden has approved the major disaster declaration for 126 counties, and I know State and local leaders are working with the administration to seek approval for the remaining counties.

Insurance industry leaders believe this could be the costliest weather event in our State's history, and we have to do everything we can to lessen the burden on Texas families.

Of course, my staff and I are in close contact with State and local leaders who are managing and executing the response, and we are constantly looking for ways to assist and move the recovery along.

In the aftermath of these widespread outages, of course, two questions jump out at you: One is, What happened? And, two, how do we prevent it from ever happening again?

We know now, at least so far, that there wasn't a single point of failure. But where it has to do with the power, this was the result of failures in equipment across the State that weren't properly winterized. Natural gas lines, wind turbines, and other power equipment froze, cutting off a huge percentage of our power generation capacity. The remaining generators were overloaded by the sky-high demand of these subzero temperatures, and much of Texas went through rolling blackouts and more.

This storm claimed the lives of nearly 80 Texans. It left millions without power and water for several days. It destroyed homes and businesses and created a sense of fear across the State.

We need to do what we can now to ensure that Texas's critical infrastructure will be able to withstand anything Mother Nature sends our way. It is not just about Texas. It is really about the critical infrastructure throughout the United States.

I am working on a measure to build grid resiliency, so we can maintain reliable power throughout any type of extreme weather. Whether it is a polar vortex or a heat wave or a hurricane or tornado, our grids and energy sources across the country must be able to operate without disruption. This should be a bipartisan priority for folks from every corner of the United States.

In Texas, we are accustomed to our infrastructure being able to withstand the high temperatures we are used to during the summer, but not the rare subzero temperatures that paralyzed the State 2 weeks ago. In other parts of the country, grids may face the opposite problem: They are able to operate during freezing temperatures but not during a heat wave. I am trying to work on a way to get funding to the States to help build grid resiliency in a way that makes sense for each of those specific needs.

Our Nation has had issues with funding grid resiliency and modernization efforts, and this is a good opportunity to make an investment in that infrastructure. My hope is that this will be a big bipartisan effort, including fellow Members of the Texas delegation and colleagues on both sides of the aisle here in the Senate. We need to do everything we can as Americans and Senators to strengthen and modernize our grid before it is tested again. Team Texas will do everything we can to get our neighbors on the road to recovery and prevent us from experiencing widespread outages in the future.

In conclusion, I want to thank everyone who has supported our State in ways big and small over the last couple of weeks and who will no doubt work with us in our efforts to come back stronger in the days that lie ahead.

I yield the floor.